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Castroland From the Inside

By James Nelson Goodsell

Latin America Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Havana

"Viva el 26 de Julio"

Signs proclaiming the July 26 anniversary of the Cuban revolution dot the landscape at every turn and serve as constant reminders that Cuban Premier Fidel Castro's government is striving to make July 26 the most important date in Cuban Communist lore.

Anniversary celebrations, which culminated in a giant rally in Santiago de Cuba Sunday, attended by more than 300,000 Cubans, went on for a full week beforehand here.

The significance of the anniversary — marking the incident 11 years ago at Moncado Barracks in Santiago which Premier Castro regards as the start of his revolution — is varied:

- To supporters of Premier Castro it marks the start of a struggle to "liberate" the island from "tentacles of foreign domination and control," as Revolución, official mouthpiece of the government here, has proclaimed.

- To Cuban exiles scattered throughout the hemisphere, the anniversary has come to be regarded as a reminder of what they see as Premier Castro's betrayal of the ideals of the revolution.

One Cuban revolutionary group in Miami has gone so far as to term the anniversary a "date to be remembered in infamy."

The celebration of the anniversary this year comes at a moment when the Organization for American States is meeting in Washington to discuss Venezuela's call for imposition of total hemisphere sanctions against Cuba.

OAS Watched Carefully

OAS deliberations are being watched carefully by Havana.

Moreover, anniversary celebrations are being used to call attention to the presence of the Guantanamo naval base close to Santiago.

This year the revolutionary regime here has a new charge to make against the United States.

One week before the anniversary date, Cuba charged the United States with "assassinating" a Cuban border guard at Guantánamo. Much is being made in the Cuban press over the killing of Ramón López Peña, whose name is being heralded on street-corner signs as a new martyr "in Cuba's long struggle against foreign imperialism and domestic traitorism."

In spite of strong denunciations of Yankee "imperialism," this correspondent is, in general, shown friendship for the United States, expressed by common Cubans in the midst of Havana.

Cuba under Fidel Castro, five years after the success of his revolution, presents a variety of contrasts. On one hand there are numerous new factories and shops giving the appearance of general prosperity. But on closer look much of Havana appears in shoddy condition than in previous years.

For example, buildings along Malecon Drive on the waterfront have a general rundown appearance where they once were fashionable homes. Hotels, which once attracted thousands of United States tourists and were regarded as some of the best in the Western Hemisphere, have a shopworn appearance.

Support Clear

Moreover some food is in short supply. Eggs, meat, coffee, and similar basics in the Cuban diet are not so readily available today. This correspondent ate a skimpy breakfast at a hotel one morning last week. He asked for eggs and bacon and was told the hotel had none. What he finally ate was moderately tasty, but included only watermelon juice, a small roll, and hot chocolate.

The average Cuban housewife must look far, often wait in line for long hours, and then be satisfied with substitutes when she shops for her daily groceries.

But at the moment, Cuban attention is turned on July 26 celebrations in Santiago de Cuba and OAS sessions in Washington. Havana newspapers are prominently displaying and commenting on both developments.